



Word order variation in subordinate clauses in spoken Danish

Jensen, Torben Juel

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Modern Danish (as well the other mainland Scandinavian languages Swedish and Norwegian) distinguishes between two different word orders: The so-called *main clause word order* is characterized by the fact that sentence adverbials and negations are placed *after* the finite verb (V2 word order):

han	kommer	ikke	i morgen
he	comes	not	tomorrow

“he doesn’t come tomorrow

In contrast, the so-called *subordinate clause word order* always has the subject of the clause in the first position, and sentence adverbials are placed *between* the subject and the finite verb (V3 word order):

han	sagde	at	han	ikke	kommer	i morgen
he	said	that	he	not	comes	tomorrow

“he said that he won’t come tomorrow”

Especially in spoken Danish there is a great deal of variation in the word order of subordinate clauses, and subordinate clauses with main clause word order are rather frequent. This variation is not new, it has existed for several centuries. Historically, the subordinate clause word order as expression of dependency is the innovation but earlier studies have demonstrated that the subordinate clause word order during the period 1500-1900 developed into being close to obligatory in subordinate clauses in *written* Danish (Gregersen & Pedersen 2000). In *spoken* Danish, however, main clause word order is still frequent in the 20th century. The phenomenon has been the object of considerable attention within generative linguistics under the heading verb movement, but it has been proposed that main clause word order in modern Danish should simply be considered embedded main clauses (embedded V2). Main clause word order is thus only possible in “bridge verb contexts”, e.g. as complements to the verb *sige* (English *say*) (e.g. Vikner 1999 & 2004). However, in modern Danish main clause word order also seem to occur rather frequently in non-bridge contexts.

It has been debated whether the variation documented in (at least) spoken modern Danish with regard to word order in subordinate sentences should be considered a sociolinguistic variable or as expressions of two different grammatical contents. Proponents of the Danish Functional Linguistics school have proposed that there is a semantic difference between “subordinate clause” and “main clause” word order which is in principle independent of the main/subordinate status of the clause. Main clause word order, which they label *declarative* word order, codes “assertive potential” – “informativity” - while subordinate clause word order (here labelled *neutral* word order) is neutral with respect to illocution. It is

“unmarked” in that respect, and it can therefore be used both with and without assertiveness or informativity (Heltoft 1999 & 2005; Christensen 2006).

The results show that main clause word order subordinate clauses is much more common than often assumed. They also show that the single most decisive factor in terms of word order in subordinate clauses are subclause function in the sentence, although also social and geographical factors have an impact.